

FIG. 1

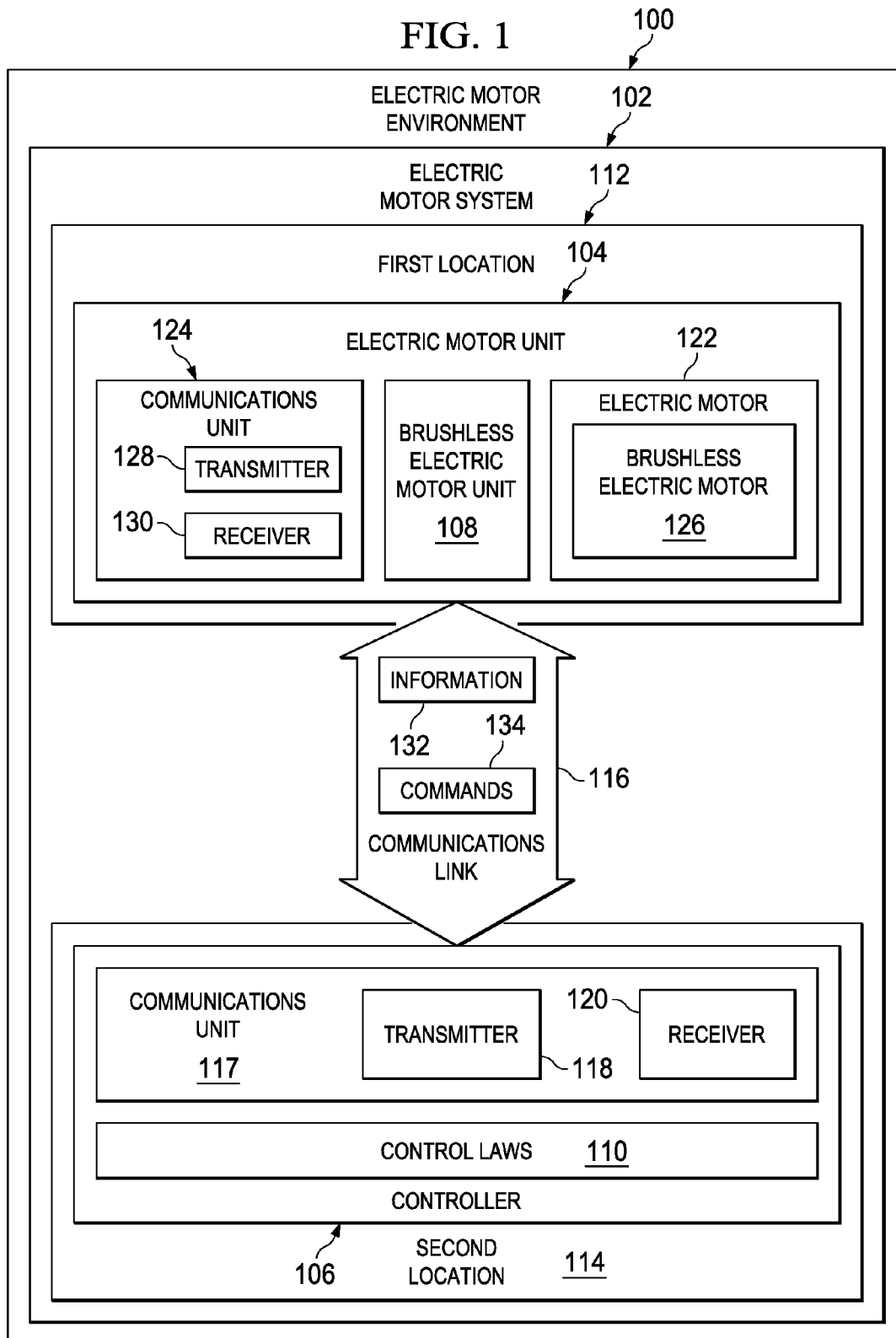
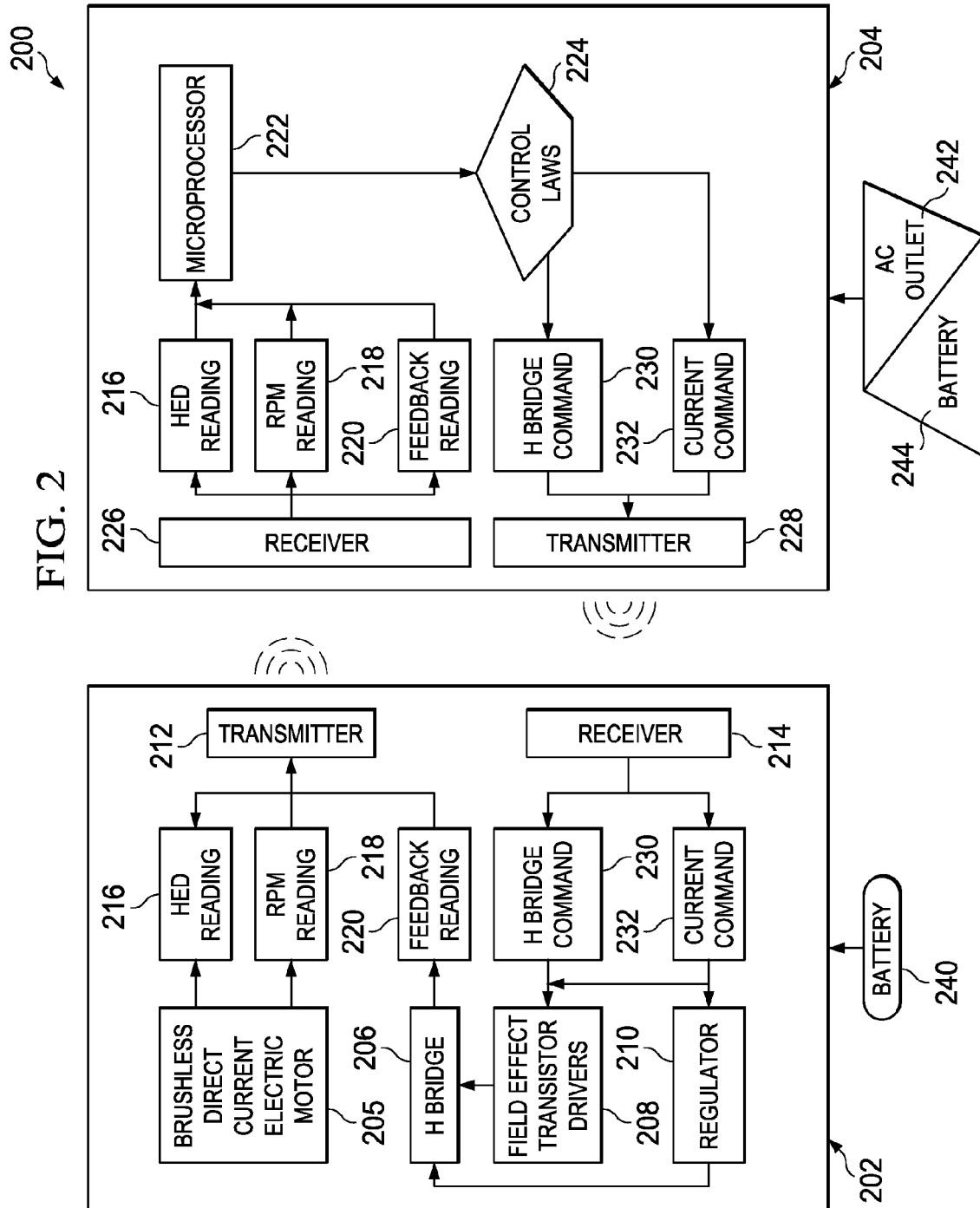


FIG. 2



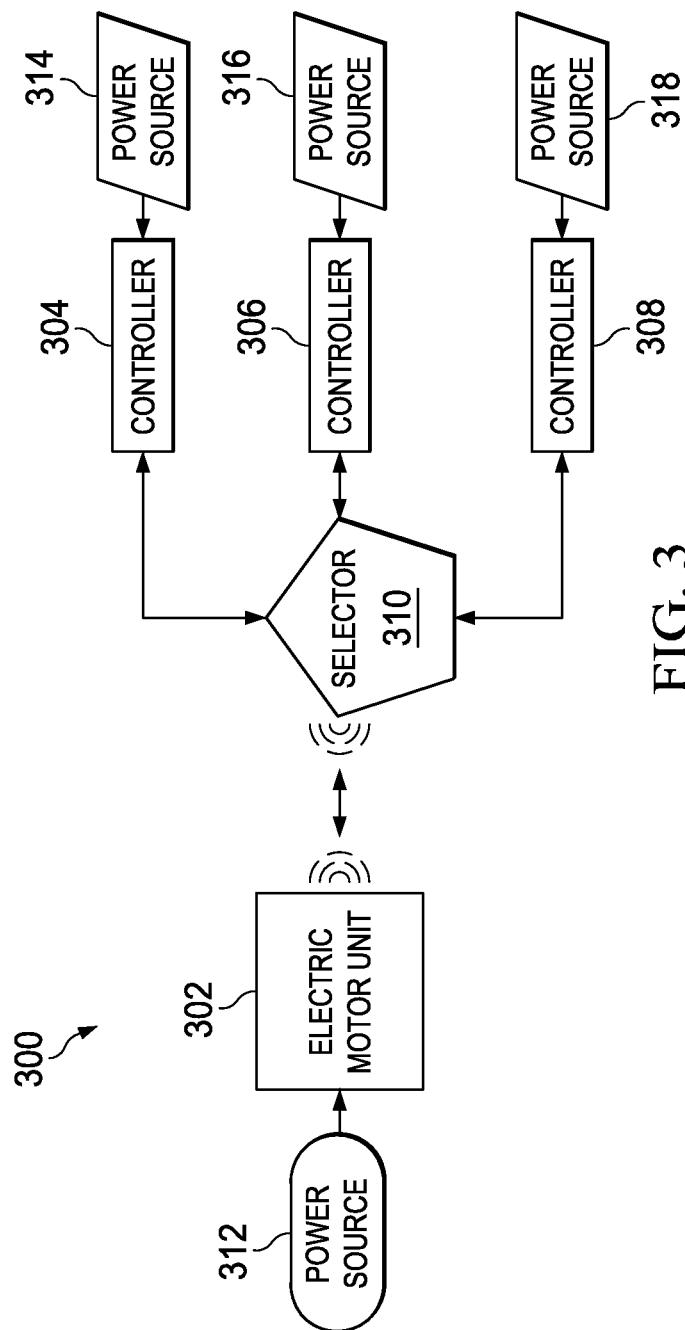


FIG. 3

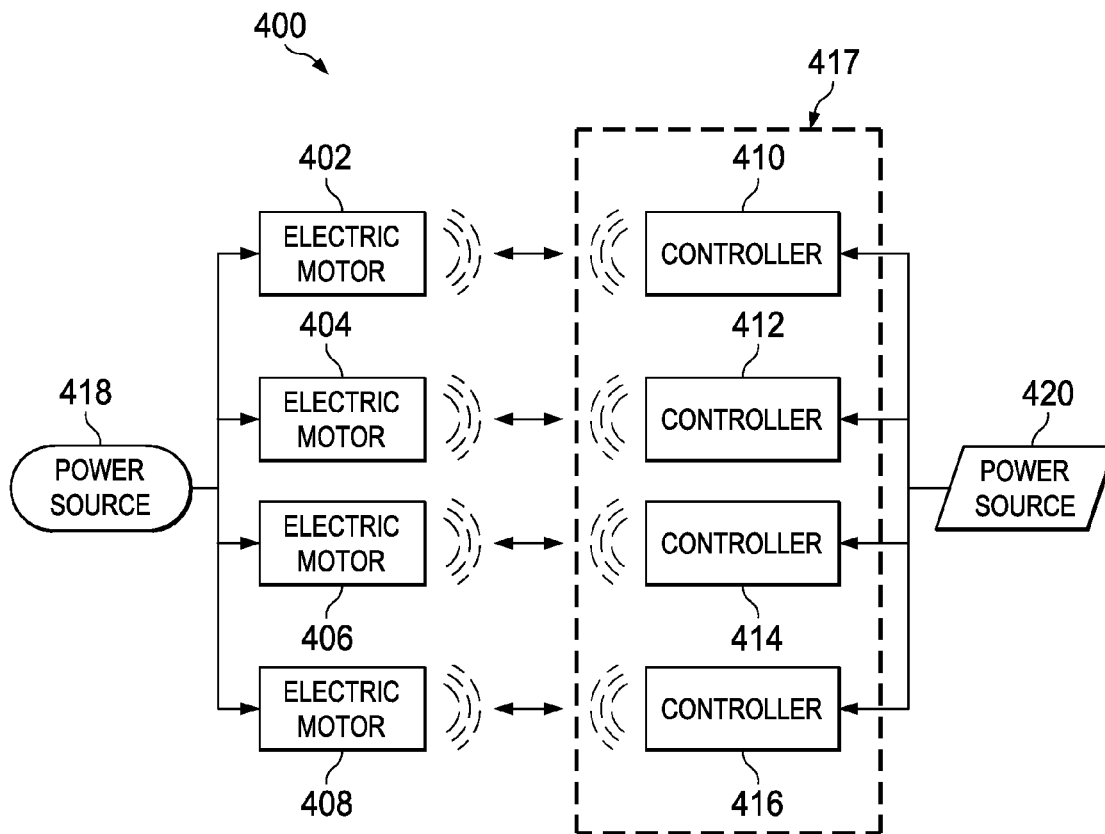


FIG. 4

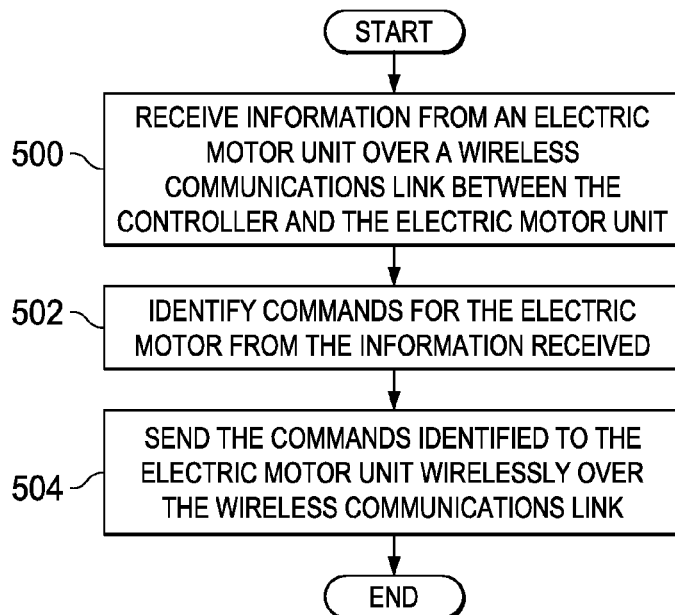
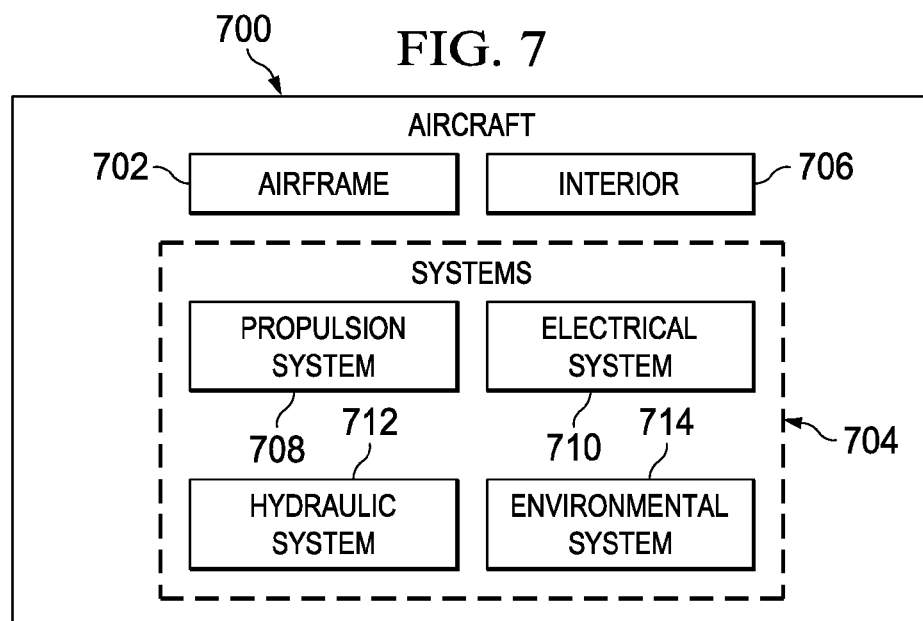
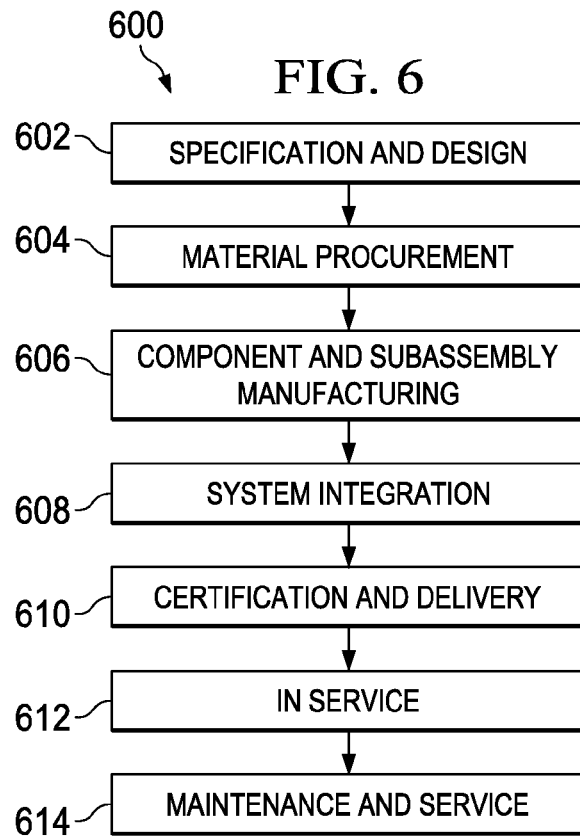


FIG. 5



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REMOTE WIRELESS MOTOR CONTROL LAW PROCESSING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Field

The present disclosure relates generally to electric motor systems and, in particular, to controlling electric motor systems. Still more particularly, the present disclosure relates to a method and apparatus for controlling the operation of electric motor units in electric motor systems.

2. Background

An electric motor is a device that converts electrical power into mechanical power. Electric motors are used for various applications. These applications include fans, pumps, tools, disk drives, drills, and other types of devices that may be found in these and other types of platforms. One type of electric motor that has become more commonly used is a brushless electric motor. This type of motor may be operated using direct current.

A brushless electric motor may be controlled through a device such as a microcontroller. A microcontroller may implement control laws to control the operation of the brushless electric motor. In particular, the control laws may be used to increase efficiency and operation of this type of electric motor.

Control laws may become more complicated, larger in number, or both, to obtain a desired efficiency for a brushless electric motor. As control laws become more complicated and larger in number, the microcontroller implementing the control laws also may become more complicated.

For example, a higher density circuit board, a larger circuit board, additional cooling, and changes may be needed. These changes may increase the weight, size, heat generation, energy use, or some combination thereof for the entire electric motor system as a whole. Further, the cooling system needed for additional cooling also uses more energy to cool the controller. As a result, the amount of energy used by the electric motor system also may increase more than desired.

Further, depending on the particular implementation, a more complex microcontroller, more than one microcontroller, or both processing the control laws may be present. As a result, higher density or larger circuit boards may be used to implement the microcontroller.

These more complex microcontrollers also may result in the use of components that have higher costs. As a result, the cost of the electric motor system may increase more than desired as compared to the benefits.

Additional microcontrollers may be used for redundancy in case one microcontroller does not operate as desired. If the second redundancy is not present, incorrectly operating microcontrollers may cause inconsistency in an electric motor that may require maintenance. This maintenance may include repair or replacement of the electric motor.

With the addition of more microcontrollers, additional heat, weight, space, and energy use may occur. These increases may not be feasible for some applications in which one or more of these factors are a concern.

With more complex microcontrollers, the use of additional microcontrollers, or both, cooling systems may become more complex, larger, or both to sufficiently cool the microcontrollers. These cooling systems also may use more energy than desired.

This type of additional redundancy, however, increases weight, size, heat generation, and electricity used. As a result, the type of systems may not be as desirable when lower

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weight, smaller size, lower heat generation, lower energy use, or some combination thereof is desired.

One solution may involve using materials that may reduce some of these factors. These materials, however, may be more expensive than desired. As a result, these types of electric motor systems may not be usable in different applications where weight, size, heat generation, energy use, or some combination thereof is of concern.

With the use of more complex microcontrollers, these microcontrollers may be more susceptible to electromagnetic interference. Electric motors generate electromagnetic interference that may affect the operation of these types of microcontrollers.

Therefore, it would be desirable to have a method and apparatus that take into account at least some of the issues discussed above, as well as other possible issues.

SUMMARY

An embodiment of the present disclosure provides an apparatus comprising a controller. The controller is configured to receive information from an electric motor unit over a wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit. The controller is further configured to identify commands for the electric motor unit from the information received. The controller is still further configured to send the commands identified to the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link.

Another embodiment of the present disclosure provides an electric motor system comprising an electric motor unit in a first location and a controller in a second location. The controller is configured to receive information from the electric motor unit over a communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit. The controller is further configured to identify commands for the electric motor unit from the information received. The controller is still further configured to send the commands identified to the electric motor unit over the communications link.

Yet another embodiment of the present disclosure provides a method for operating an electric motor unit. Information is received from the electric motor unit over a wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit. Commands are identified for the electric motor unit from the information received. The commands identified are sent to the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link.

The features and functions can be achieved independently in various embodiments of the present disclosure or may be combined in yet other embodiments in which further details can be seen with reference to the following description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the illustrative embodiments are set forth in the appended claims. The illustrative embodiments, however, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objectives and features thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment of the present disclosure when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an electric motor environment in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an electric motor system in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

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FIG. 3 is another illustration of an electric motor system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 4 is yet another illustration of an electric motor system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 5 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for operating an electric motor unit in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 6 is an illustration of an aircraft manufacturing and service method in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment; and

FIG. 7 is an illustration of an aircraft in the form of a block diagram in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account one or more different considerations. For example, the illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account that currently, a controller is in the same location as an electric motor. In other words, the controller and the electric motor may be in the same physical unit. The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account that the controller may be placed in a remote location from the electric motor. In this manner, the electric motor may be placed in the location where factors such as at least one of weight, size, heat generation, energy use, or other suitable considerations, are crucial.

As used herein, the phrase “at least one of,” when used with a list of items, means different combinations of one or more of the listed items may be used and only one of each item in the list may be needed. For example, “at least one of item A, item B, or item C” may include, without limitation, item A, item A and item B, or item B. This example also may include item A, item B, and item C or item B and item C. Of course, any combinations of these items may be present. In other examples, “at least one of” may be, for example, without limitation, two of item A, one of item B, and ten of item C; four of item B and seven of item C; and other suitable combinations. The item may be a particular object, thing, or a category. In other words, at least one of means any combination of items and number of items may be used from the list but not all of the items in the list are required.

The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account that the separation of the controller from the electric motor is different from currently used systems where an operator uses a remote control. These types of systems allow for a remote user input but the controller with the control laws is still in the same location as the electric motor.

The illustrative embodiments provide a method and apparatus for operating an electric motor unit. In one illustrative embodiment, an apparatus comprises a controller configured to receive information from an electric motor unit over a wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit, identify commands for the electric motor unit from the information received, and send the commands identified to the electric motor unit wirelessly over the wireless communications link.

With reference now to the figures and, in particular, with reference to FIG. 1, an illustration of an electric motor environment is depicted in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Electric motor environment 100 is an example of an environment in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented.

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Electric motor system 102 in electric motor environment 100 includes a number of different components. As depicted, electric motor system 102 includes electric motor unit 104 and controller 106.

Electric motor unit 104 is configured to generate rotary or linear torque or force. In this illustrative example, electric motor unit 104 may take the form of brushless electric motor unit 108.

Controller 106 is a hardware device in these illustrative examples. Controller 106 may include software. The hardware may include circuits that operate to perform the operations in controller 106. In this illustrative example, controller 106 may take the form of an impulse width modulation controller (IWMC) that modulates a switching frequency, among many other things such as switch timing and logic, used to drive switches in the form of transistors that control the current sent to electric motor unit 104. In particular, controller 106 controls the operation of electric motor unit 104.

In the illustrative examples, the hardware may take the form of a circuit system, an integrated circuit, an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), a programmable logic device, or some other suitable type of hardware configured to perform a number of operations. With a programmable logic device, the device is configured to perform the number of operations. The device may be reconfigured at a later time or may be permanently configured to perform the number of operations. Examples of programmable logic devices include, for example, a programmable logic array, a programmable array logic, a field programmable logic array, a field programmable gate array, and other suitable hardware devices. Additionally, the processes may be implemented in organic components integrated with inorganic components and/or may be comprised entirely of organic components excluding a human being. For example, the processes may be implemented as circuits in organic semiconductors.

In this illustrative example, a group of control laws 110 are present in controller 106. The group of control laws 110 is one or more processes, functions, or some other mechanism configured to control the operation of electric motor unit 104. As depicted, the group of control laws 110 may be implemented in hardware, software, or some combination of the two.

The group of control laws 110 may be used to control operation of electric motor unit 104 in a desired manner. A “group of,” as used herein with reference to items, means one or more items. For example, a group of control laws 110 is one or more control laws. As depicted, electric motor unit 104 is located in first location 112. Controller 106 is located in second location 114. First location 112 may be a remote location to second location 114.

In these illustrative examples, the placement of electric motor unit 104 in first location 112 and controller 106 in second location 114 allows for electric motor unit 104 to be reduced by at least one of weight, size, heat generation, or energy use as compared to currently designed electric motors. Different components affecting these factors with respect to controller 106 are in a different location from electric motor unit 104. In other words, circuits and cooling systems for controller 106 are in second location 114 rather than with electric motor unit 104 in first location 112.

In this illustrative example, electric motor unit 104 and controller 106 communicate using communications link 116. Communications link 116 may take various forms in different illustrative examples. For example, communications link 116 may be selected from one of a wireless communications link, a wired communications link, an optical communications link, and other suitable types of communications links.

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In addition to the group of control laws **110**, controller **106** also includes communications unit **117**. Communications unit **117** includes transmitter **118** and receiver **120**. In this particular example, electric motor unit **104** includes electric motor **122** and communications unit **124**. Electric motor **122** may be brushless electric motor **126**. As depicted, communications unit **124** includes transmitter **128** and receiver **130**.

During operation, transmitter **128** in communications unit **124** for electric motor unit **104** is configured to send information **132** to controller **106** over communications link **116**. Receiver **120** in communications unit **124** for controller **106** is configured to receive information **132** transmitted by electric motor unit **104**. Information **132** may be, for example, speed, voltage, current, temperature, or other information that may be generated by sensors in or associated with electric motor **122**.

Information **132** is any information that is used by the group of control laws **110** to control the operation of electric motor unit **104** and, in particular, the operation of electric motor **122** in electric motor unit **104**. Information **132** by receiver **120** is used by the group of control laws **110** to generate commands **134** for electric motor unit **104** from information **132** received from electric motor unit **104**. Controller **106** is configured to send commands **134** identified by the group of control laws **110** in controller **106** over communications link **116**. For example, commands **134** may be sent wirelessly over a wireless communications link.

In this manner, electric motor system **102** may provide for at least one of reduced weight, size, heat generation, or energy use by electric motor unit **104**. In these illustrative examples, electromagnetic interference in controller **106**, electric motor unit **104**, or both also may be reduced with electric motor unit **104** being in first location **112** and controller **106** being in second location **114**. First location **112** and second location **114** may be selected to reduce electromagnetic interference.

As can be seen, electric motor system **102** with electric motor unit **104** in first location **112** and controller **106** in second location **114** reduces issues regarding weight, size, heat generation, energy use, or other suitable considerations for first location **112**. The components that may affect these considerations are within controller **106** in second location **114** in this illustrative example. This is in contrast to currently available electric motor systems that have remote control input in which user input is received at a device and transmitted wirelessly to a controller that is located in the same location as the electric motor unit. In other words, currently used electric motor systems may allow for remote input from an operator. However, the control laws are implemented in the same location as the electric motor unit.

Additionally, electric motor system **102** also may have reduced issues with respect to electromagnetic interference with the placement of electric motor unit **104** in first location **112** and controller **106** in second location **114**. Further, the size of electric motor unit **104** is reduced because components in controller **106** are not located in electric motor unit **104**. As a result, additional flexibility in the placement of electric motor unit **104** may be present. For example, by reducing the size of electric motor unit **104**, electric motor unit **104** may be used in more locations based on the reduced size when the locations have space considerations with respect to electric motor systems. In this illustrative example, electric motor system **102** may be a remote wireless motor control law processing system.

The illustration of electric motor environment **100** in FIG. **1** is not meant to imply physical or architectural limitations to the manner in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. Other components in addition to or in place of

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the ones illustrated may be used. Some components may be unnecessary. Also, the blocks are presented to illustrate some functional components. One or more of these blocks may be combined, divided, or combined and divided into different blocks when implemented in an illustrative embodiment.

For example, controller **106** may be configured to control one or more electric motor units in addition to electric motor unit **104**. In still other illustrative examples, one or more controllers in addition to controller **106** may be used to control electric motor unit **104** or one or more electric motor units in addition to or in place of electric motor unit **104**.

In other illustrative examples, one or more electric motor units may be controlled by controller **106** in addition to or in place of electric motor unit **104**. In still other illustrative examples, more controllers may be used with or in place of controller **106** to control electric motor unit **104** along with any other electric motor units that may be present in electric motor system **102** in electric motor environment **100**. With multiple controllers, redundancy may be provided for electric motor system **102**.

Further, controller **106** may take other forms other than an impulse width modulation controller. For example, controller **106** also may be a pulse width modulation controller in some illustrative examples.

With reference next to FIG. **2**, an illustration of an electric motor system is depicted in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Electric motor system **200** is an example of one implementation for electric motor system **102** in FIG. **1**. In this illustrative example, electric motor system **200** includes electric motor unit **202** and controller **204**. Controller **204** includes control law circuits.

In this illustrative example, electric motor unit **202** includes power and mechanical components. As depicted, electric motor unit **202** includes brushless direct current (DC) electric motor **205**, H bridge **206**, field effect transistor (FET) drivers **208**, regulator **210**, transmitter **212**, and receiver **214**.

In this illustrative example, H bridge **206**, field effect transistor (FET) drivers **208**, and regulator **210** are circuits that cause electric motor unit **202** to rotate in a desired direction with a desired speed. The direction and speed of the rotation of electric motor unit **202** occurs in response to commands received from controller **204**. In this illustrative example, controller **204** contains the circuitry that generates the commands.

As depicted, Hall effect device (HED) reading **216**, revolutions per minute (RPM) reading **218**, and feedback reading **220** are examples of information that are sent wirelessly by transmitter **212** to controller **204**. Hall effect device (HED) reading **216** and revolutions per minute (RPM) reading **218** are information that may be generated from sensors in brushless direct current (DC) electric motor **205**. A Hall effect device may be used to provide information such as angular position of electric motor unit **202**. In these illustrative examples, feedback reading **220** may include information such as current, voltage, and other suitable information from H bridge **206**. Feedback reading **220** may be information that may be used by controller **204** to control operation of electric motor unit **202**.

As depicted, controller **204** includes microprocessor **222** in which control laws **224** are implemented as software. Additionally, controller **204** also includes receiver **226** and transmitter **228**. Receiver **226** is configured to receive Hall effect device (HED) reading **216**, revolutions per minute (RPM) reading **218**, and feedback reading **220** sent wirelessly by electric motor unit **202**.

As depicted, control laws **224** are configured to identify commands, such as H bridge command **230** and current command **232**. These commands are sent by transmitter **228** wirelessly to electric motor unit **202**. Receiver **214** in electric motor unit **202** receives H bridge command **230** and current command **232**. As depicted, H bridge command **230** may be used by field effect transistor (FET) drivers **208** to adjust the frequency at which brushless direct current (DC) electric motor **205** operates, as well as which switches to close and open on H bridge **206** and when the switches close and open. Current command **232** is used by regulator **210** to adjust the amount of current sent to brushless direct current (DC) electric motor **205** by H bridge **206**. In summary, H bridge command **230** dictates “which switches close and open” and when those switches “close and open.” Current command **232** dictates the “for how long the switches are closed and opened.” How long the switches are closed and open may be referred to as the duty cycle.

In this illustrative example, electric motor unit **202** is powered by battery **240**. Controller **204** is connected to alternating current (AC) outlet **242**. Additionally, battery **244** may serve as a backup or alternate power source for controller **204**. In some cases, battery **244** may be used in place of the connection to alternating current outlet **242**. Of course, depending on implementation, electric motor unit **202** also may be connected to an alternating current outlet or other electrical energy source.

With reference now to FIG. 3, another illustration of an electric motor system is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Electric motor system **300** is an example of one implementation for electric motor system **102** in FIG. 1.

In this illustrative example, electric motor system **300** includes electric motor unit **302**, controller **304**, controller **306**, controller **308**, and selector **310**. Electric motor unit **302** is connected to power source **312**. Controller **304** is connected to power source **314**, controller **306** is connected to power source **316**, and controller **308** is connected to power source **318**. These power sources may take various forms. For example, a power source may include at least one of a battery, an alternating current source, or some other suitable type of power source. In some illustrative examples, these power sources may be the same rather than different power sources depending on the particular implementation.

In this illustrative example, information generated by electric motor unit **302** is sent to controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308** through selector **310**. In other words, selector **310** may include a communications unit that communicates back and forth wirelessly with electric motor unit **302**. In other words, selector **310** send commands and receives data in which bidirectional communication is present between selector **310**, controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308**.

As depicted, controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308** are a plurality of controllers and may all generate commands for electric motor unit **302**. These commands are sent to selector **310**. Selector **310** selects commands from one of controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308** to send to electric motor unit **302**. In this illustrative example, electric motor unit **302** may be implemented using electric motor unit **202** in FIG. 2. Selector **310** may be a voter resolution unit. In other words, selector **310** selects a set of commands from one of the controllers to send to electric motor unit **302**. For example, selector **310** may compare the commands from controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308**. If a difference is present, selector **310** may select a command with a greatest number of matches from the controllers. A controller

operating in an undesired manner may generate commands that are different from other controllers operating as desired.

In this manner, undesired commands that may be sent to electric motor unit **302** may be avoided with selector **310**. In some cases, commands may be averaged or combined rather than merely selected.

In this manner, the configuration of controllers in electric motor system **300** may provide for redundancy. This redundancy may take into account that one of controller **304**, controller **306**, and controller **308** may not always operate as desired. In this manner, undesired operation of electric motor unit **302** may be avoided. In this manner, controllers, such as controller **304**, controller **306**, controller **308** may be provided for redundancy but may be in a location remote to electric motor unit **302**. As a result, the weight, bulk, size, heat, and other factors with respect to the controllers do not affect electric motor unit **302**. As a result, electric motor unit **302** may be placed in locations not possible currently available for existing electric motor systems.

Turning next to FIG. 4, yet another illustration of an electric motor system is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, electric motor system **400** includes electric motor **402**, electric motor **404**, electric motor **406**, electric motor **408**, controller **410**, controller **412**, controller **414**, and controller **416**. As depicted, electric motor **402**, electric motor **404**, electric motor **406**, and electric motor **408** are connected to power source **418**.

In this illustrative example, controller **410**, controller **412**, controller **414**, and controller **416** may form command center **417**. Command center **417** is configured to control the operation of electric motor **402**, electric motor **404**, electric motor **406**, and electric motor **408**. As depicted, controller **410**, controller **412**, controller **414**, and controller **416** are connected to power source **420**. Each of these power sources may be a battery, an alternating current power source, or some other suitable type of power source.

In this illustrative example, each of the controllers may be assigned to control one or more electric motors. Further, the different controllers may act as backups or failovers in case other controllers do not operate as desired.

For example, electric motor **402**, electric motor **404**, electric motor **406**, and electric motor **408** may be actuators that may be moved to control movement of other structures. For example, these electric motors may be actuators for control surfaces in an aircraft. In other illustrative examples, these electric motors may be actuators for a robotic arm. In the illustrative example, electric motor **402** may be able to recover from errors that may occur from commands generated by controller **410**. Electric motor **404** may be a critical actuator that cannot operate with an incorrect command. Further, in this illustrative example, electric motor **406** and electric motor **408** may not move until after electric motor **402** and electric motor **404** have moved.

As depicted, controller **410** controls electric motor **402**. Controller **412** controls electric motor **404**. Controller **414** and controller **416** may assist in controlling electric motor **404** because electric motor **406** and electric motor **408** may not move until after electric motor **402** and electric motor **404** have moved. In this manner, electric motor **404** may have a desired amount of redundancy because electric motor **404** is not as tolerant of commands that may cause undesired movement.

In this particular example, after electric motor **402** and electric motor **404** have moved, controller **414** controls electric motor **406** and controller **416** controls electric motor **408**. Depending on the redundancy desired, controller **410** and controller **412** may also aid in operating electric motor **408**.

In this manner, the components that may add to the bulkiness of an electric motor system are located in a location away from the electric motors themselves. As a result, electric motor system **400** may be especially suited for use where space may be of concern such as in a robotic arm. Other features are provided such as a reduction in weight, heat, and other factors with electric motor system **400** and the use of command center **417**. Another implementation may include implementing electric motor system **400** in prosthetic or bionic limbs, such as an arm, a leg, a hand, or some other suitable implementation. In this manner, the plurality of controllers is configured to control operation of a number of electric motor units in the plurality of electric motor units over a plurality of wireless communications links shown in this figure.

The illustration of the different configurations for electric motor systems in FIGS. 2-4 are not meant to limit the manner in which other illustrative embodiments may be implemented. Electric motor system **200**, electric motor system **300**, and electric motor system **400** have been provided for purposes of illustrating some examples of how an electric motor system may be implemented in accordance with an illustrative embodiment.

For example, other electric motor systems may include other numbers of electric motors other than the four electric motors shown in FIG. 4. For example, three electric motors, seven electric motors, or some other number of electric motors may be used. Further, other numbers of controllers may be present. For example, six controllers may be used instead of four controllers used to control the four electric motors illustrated in FIG. 4.

As another illustrative example, other types of indications may be used other than wireless communications. Although radiofrequency signals may be used, other types of signaling may also be used. For example, optical signals that travel through an interface or optical cable may be used.

With reference now to FIG. 5, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for operating an electric motor unit is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. The process illustrated in FIG. 5 may be implemented in electric motor system **102** in FIG. 1. In particular, some or all of these operations may be implemented in a group of control laws **110** in controller **106**.

The process begins by receiving information from an electric motor unit over a wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit (operation **500**). Next, commands are identified for the electric motor from the information received (operation **502**). The process then sends the commands identified to the electric motor unit wirelessly over the wireless communications link (operation **504**), with the process terminating thereafter.

The flowcharts and block diagrams in the different depicted embodiments illustrate the architecture, functionality, and operation of some possible implementations of apparatuses and methods in an illustrative embodiment. In this regard, each block in the flowcharts or block diagrams may represent a module, a segment, a function, and/or a portion of an operation or step. For example, one or more of the blocks may be implemented as program code, in hardware, or a combination of the program code and hardware. When implemented in hardware, the hardware may, for example, take the form of integrated circuits that are manufactured or configured to perform one or more operations in the flowcharts or block diagrams. When implemented as a combination of program code and hardware, the implementation may take the form of firmware.

In some alternative implementations of an illustrative embodiment, the function or functions noted in the blocks may occur out of the order noted in the figures. For example, in some cases, two blocks shown in succession may be executed substantially concurrently, or the blocks may sometimes be performed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. Also, other blocks may be added in addition to the illustrated blocks in a flowchart or block diagram.

The illustrative embodiments of the disclosure may be described in the context of aircraft manufacturing and service method **600** as shown in FIG. 6 and aircraft **700** as shown in FIG. 7. Turning first to FIG. 6, an illustration of an aircraft manufacturing and service method is depicted in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. During pre-production, aircraft manufacturing and service method **600** may include specification and design **602** of aircraft **700** in FIG. 7 and material procurement **604**.

During production, component and subassembly manufacturing **606** and system integration **608** of aircraft **700** in FIG. 7 takes place. Thereafter, aircraft **700** in FIG. 7 may go through certification and delivery **610** in order to be placed in service **612**. While in service **612** by a customer, aircraft **700** in FIG. 7 is scheduled for routine maintenance and service **614**, which may include modification, reconfiguration, refurbishment, and other maintenance or service.

Each of the processes of aircraft manufacturing and service method **600** may be performed or carried out by a system integrator, a third party, and/or an operator. In these examples, the operator may be a customer. For the purposes of this description, a system integrator may include, without limitation, any number of aircraft manufacturers and major-system subcontractors; a third party may include, without limitation, any number of vendors, subcontractors, and suppliers; and an operator may be an airline, a leasing company, a military entity, a service organization, and so on.

With reference now to FIG. 7, an illustration of an aircraft is depicted in the form of a block diagram in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. In this example, aircraft **700** is produced by aircraft manufacturing and service method **600** in FIG. 6 and may include airframe **702** with systems **704** and interior **706**. Examples of systems **704** include one or more of propulsion system **708**, electrical system **710**, hydraulic system **712**, and environmental system **714**. Any number of other systems may be included. Although an aerospace example is shown, different illustrative embodiments may be applied to other industries, such as the automotive industry.

Apparatuses and methods embodied herein may be employed during at least one of the stages of aircraft manufacturing and service method **600** in FIG. 6.

In one illustrative example, components or subassemblies produced in component and subassembly manufacturing **606** in FIG. 6 may be fabricated or manufactured in a manner similar to components or subassemblies produced while aircraft **700** is in service **612** in FIG. 6. As yet another example, one or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized during production stages, such as component and subassembly manufacturing **606** and system integration **608** in FIG. 6. One or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized while aircraft **700** is in service **612** and/or during maintenance and service **614** in FIG. 6. The use of a number of the different illustrative embodiments may substantially expedite the assembly of and/or reduce the cost of aircraft **700**.

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In one illustrative example, components or subassemblies produced in component and subassembly manufacturing **606** in FIG. **6** may be fabricated or manufactured in a manner similar to components or subassemblies produced while aircraft **700** is in service **612** in FIG. **6**. For example, electric motor systems may be manufactured for use in aircraft during one or more of these different stages.

As yet another example, one or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized during production stages, such as component and subassembly manufacturing **606** and system integration **608** in FIG. **6**. As another example, during in service **612**, one or more illustrative embodiments may be implemented to control the operation of electric motors in a manner that increases the efficiency of electric motors. One or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized while aircraft **700** is in service **612** and/or during maintenance and service **614** in FIG. **6**. The use of a number of the different illustrative embodiments may substantially expedite the assembly of and/or reduce the cost of aircraft **700**.

Thus, in the illustrative examples, electric motor system **102** with electric motor unit **104** and controller **106** in separate physical locations reduce at least one of cost, weight, size, heat generation, or energy use. Electric motor system **102** also may provide for increased flexibility, redundancy, and other features that are not currently possible with current electric motor systems. The separation of controller **106** from electric motor unit **104** allows for electric motor unit **104** to be used in more locations than currently possible.

The description of the different illustrative embodiments has been presented for purposes of illustration and description, and is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the embodiments in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Further, different illustrative embodiments may provide different features as compared to other illustrative embodiments.

Of course, although different examples have been described with respect to using electric motors in aircraft, the illustrative embodiments may be implemented for electric motors used in other applications. For example, electric motors in accordance with an illustrative embodiment may be implemented in manufacturing tools, automobiles, spacecraft, satellites, trains, appliances, or other suitable objects. In rockets, for example, the stirrers for the fuel tanks may implement an electric motor system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In yet another illustrative example, an electric motor system implemented in accordance with an illustrative embodiment may be used in human implants with at least one of less weight, a smaller size, less heat generation, less energy use, reduced cost, increased flexibility of placement, increased redundancy, as well as other considerations.

In still other illustrative examples, an electric motor system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment is used in a robot, a robotic surgeon, a nanobot, or some other suitable device. For example, in these illustrative implementations, the increased flexibility of placement of electric motor units may be present from the separation of the electric motor units from the controllers. As a result, electric motor units may be used in locations that are currently infeasible because of the size of the electric motor systems.

The description of the different illustrative embodiments has been presented for purposes of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the embodiments in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art.

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For example, although some illustrative examples have described the electric motor as in brushless direct current electric motor, other illustrative examples may use other types of electric motors. For example, an alternating current (AC) electric motor also may be used in different illustrative examples.

Further, different illustrative embodiments may provide different features as compared to other illustrative embodiments. The embodiment or embodiments selected are chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the embodiments, the practical application, and to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the disclosure for various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:

a controller configured to

receive information from an electric motor unit over a wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit,

identify commands for the electric motor unit from the information received, and

send the commands identified to the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link;

a plurality of controllers, including the controller, configured to

identify the commands for the electric motor unit from the information received; and

a selector configured to

select the commands from one of the plurality of controllers, and

send the commands selected to the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the electric motor unit.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the controller comprises:

a group of control laws configured to identify the commands for the electric motor unit from the information received.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the controller further comprises:

a receiver configured to receive the information from the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link; and

a transmitter configured to send the commands identified to the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the electric motor unit comprises:

an electric motor;

a transmitter configured to send the information to the controller; and

a receiver configured to receive the commands from the controller.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

the plurality of controllers, including the controller, configured to

receive the information from the electric motor unit over the wireless communications link between the controller and the electric motor unit.

7. The apparatus of claim 6 further comprising:

the selector configured to

receive the commands for the electric motor unit from the plurality of controllers.

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8. The apparatus of claim 6 further comprising:
 a plurality of electric motor units, including the electric
 motor unit, wherein the plurality of controllers is con-
 figured to control operation of a number of electric
 motor units in the plurality of electric motor units over a
 plurality of wireless communications links, including
 the communications link.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the electric motor unit
 is selected from one of a brushless electric motor unit, a direct
 current electric motor, and an alternating current electric
 motor.

10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the controller is an
 impulse width modulation controller.

11. An electric motor system comprising:
 an electric motor unit in a first location;
 a controller in a second location, wherein the controller is
 configured to
 receive information from the electric motor unit over a
 communications link between the controller and the
 electric motor unit,
 identify commands for the electric motor unit from the
 information received, and
 send the commands identified to the electric motor unit
 over the communications link; and
 a plurality of controllers, including the controller, config-
 ured to
 identify the commands for the electric motor unit from
 the information received; and
 a selector configured to
 select the commands from one of the plurality of con-
 trollers, and
 send the commands selected to the electric motor unit
 over the communications link.

12. The electric motor system of claim 11, wherein the
 communications link is selected from one of a wireless com-
 munications link, and an optical communications link.

13. A method for operating an electric motor unit, the
 method comprising:
 receiving information from the electric motor unit over a
 wireless communications link between a controller and
 the electric motor unit;
 identifying commands for the electric motor unit from the
 information received; and

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sending the commands identified to the electric motor unit
 over the wireless communications link;
 identifying, by a plurality of controllers including the con-
 troller, the commands for the electric motor unit from the
 information received;
 selecting, by a selector, the commands from one of the
 plurality of controllers; and
 sending, by the selector, the commands selected to the
 electric motor unit over the wireless communications
 link.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein identifying the com-
 mands for the electric motor unit from the information
 received comprises:

identifying, by a group of control laws in the controller, the
 commands for the electric motor unit from the informa-
 tion received.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein a receiver in the
 controller receives the information from the electric motor
 unit over the wireless communications link, and a transmitter
 in the controller sends the commands identified to the electric
 motor unit over the wireless communications link.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the electric motor unit
 comprises an electric motor, a transmitter that sends the infor-
 mation to the controller, and a receiver that receives the com-
 mands from the controller.

17. The method of claim 13,
 wherein the plurality of controllers, including the control-
 ler,
 receives the information from the electric motor unit
 over the wireless communications link between the
 controller and the electric motor unit.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising:
 sending the commands from the plurality of controllers and
 the commands from the electric motor unit to the selec-
 tor over the wireless communications link.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein the plurality of con-
 trollers is configured to control operation of a number of
 electric motor units in a plurality of electric motor units,
 including the electric motor unit.

20. The method of claim 13, wherein the electric motor unit
 is selected from one of a brushless electric motor unit, a direct
 current electric motor, and an alternating current electric
 motor.

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